



MYTH AND HISTORY IN OIKIST TRADITIONS: ARCHIAS OF SYRACUSE

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In this paper I shall briefly introduce an oikist tradition that grew around the foundation of Syracuse in the middle of the eighth century BCE. Through this we shall try to understand the origin and the circulation of the myth and whether we can find elements based on a historical record. We shall show the myth as it has been handed down from literary sources. The version, as it has reached us, is taken from late sources, Plutarch, Diodorus Siculus and from a scholium of Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* in a uniform way, except for some variants. We shall try to find the nucleus of this tradition based probably on a previous myth settled in Boeotia. Finally we will try, if it is possible, to recognise in it an archaic tradition.

The date of the foundation of Syracuse, following a Thucydidean chronology,¹ is about 733 BCE; another chronology reached us through the mediation of Ephorus and Philistus that advanced the *ktisis* to 756 BCE² According to Plutarch,³ Archias, the founder of Syracuse, was

¹ Thuc., VI 3-4. See T.J. Dunbabin, *The Western Greeks*, Oxford 1948, p. 435.

² Philist., *FGrHist*, 556 F 2= St. Byz. s.v. Δύμη; G. Vanotti, 'L'archaiologia siciliana di Filisto', in *Hesperia 3. Studi sulla grecità d'Occidente*, a cura di L. Braccesi, Roma 1993, pp. 133-135. Also in Diodorus Siculus we find a non-Thucydidean chronology that probably derives from Ephorus of Kyme: T.

forced to leave Corinth because he killed Actaeon. Archias, fallen in love with Actaeon, decided to steal him from the house of the father Melissus but during this attempt a brawl broke out which caused the death of Actaeon. Melissus, who was not able to obtain justice for his son's murder, committed suicide after invoking Poseidon's curse on the Corinthians. A plague broke out and Archias, under the order of the Delphic oracle, was forced to leave Corinth. This source gives too much weight to the Delphic oracle⁴ and underlines the importance that the god had in general in the Corinthian colonisation of Syracuse. In fact antiquity has handed down two foundation oracles.

We have notice of a common prophecy given to Archias and Myscellus, the oikist of Croton. When they were consulting the oracle, the god asked them whether they chose wealth or health; Archias chose wealth and founded Syracuse, Myscellus chose health and founded Croton.⁵ Another oracle comes from Pausanias.⁶ Also Diodorus Siculus⁷ describes the episode of Actaeon and Archias but he stopped at the young man's death. Finally, the story is described in a scholium of Apollonius⁸ in which Archias is mentioned and includes the Delphic oracle, but this source presents differences: Archias is not the main character and there is only a general reference to the Bacchiads. Then the author introduces a new element: the departure of Chersicrates, Corcyra's founder, involved in the same story of Archias. Finally, as in the other text, Pheidon of Argos is mentioned, but now he is in the same generation of Melissus and not in that of Habron, like in the Plutarchean text.⁹

The dead boy has the name of a mythical hero of Boeotia: Actaeon, who, having surprised Artemis naked, died torn by his dogs. The story is

Alfieri Tonini, comm. Diodoro Siculo, *Biblioteca Storica*, libri XIV-XVII, Milano 1985, pp. 35 ss.

³ Plut., *Mor.*, 772e-773b.

⁴ C. Dougherty, *The Poetics of Colonization: From City to Text in Archaic Greece*, New York 1993, p. 179, n.1

⁵ Strabo VI 2,4, C 269.

⁶ Paus. V 7,3.

⁷ Diod., VIII 10.

⁸ Ap. Rh., IV 1212.

⁹ G. Ragone, 'Riflessioni sulla documentazione storica su Fidone di Argo', in *Argo, una democrazia diversa*, a cura di C. Bearzot, F. Landucci, Milano 2006, pp. 48-49.

told by Apollodorus, in the *Library*.¹⁰ In the text Apollodorus refers of two different versions: Actaeon, son of Autonoe and Aristaeus, according to Acusilaus, perished because Zeus was angry at him for wooing Semele; but "according to the more general opinion", he saw Artemis bathing. And they say that the goddess transformed him into a deer, and drove his fifty dogs mad, which devoured him. Almost the same version appears in Pausanias,¹¹ who presents the opinion of Stesichorus of Himera: Actaeon, while hunting, saw Artemis was bathing. The goddess cast a deer skin round Actaeon in such a way that his dogs would kill him, but like Stesichorus says, it is because Actaeon wanted to take Semele as wife.

Actaeon is torn by his dogs while the Corinthian hero is rent by his parents and by Archias. H. Jeamarie has observed that the first myth refers to a ritual of *diasparagmos* and of *mania* attributed to a Dionysian phase of the Greek religion.¹² This is an element that we can find also in the Corinthian Actaeon's death, establishing another similarity with the Boeotian's myth. But Actaeon's kidnapping by Archias reminds us of some traditions of archaic, aristocratic, and military Greece. Strabo, who refers to a passage of Ephorus from Cuma,¹³ describes the organization of the Cretan *agela* that could be the example for the other Doric society. The tradition of the kidnapping could correspond to a custom practised in old Corinth. In the same way the tragic event of this kidnapping was a pretext in Crete and in other places to see Actaeon's myth in this way.

The ritual, described by Ephorus, gives us a chance to understand that these practices had a homosexual background. The boy perhaps between 14 and 16 is chosen by an *agelaos*, after his parents' consent and setting the day of the kidnapping. If the robber belongs to the same rank or to a higher one, his parents pretend a resistance. In this case the boy has a passive task. The fiction keeps on until the boy is dragged to the robber's house. After two months of isolation, the boy comes back home with military equipment, he makes a sacrifice to Zeus, and he

¹⁰ Apollod., *Bibl.*, III 4,4

¹¹ Paus., IX 2,3.

¹² H. Jeanmaire, *Dionysos: histoire du culte de Bacchus*, Paris 1951, pp. 201, 266. B. Sergent, *L'omosexualité dans la mythologie grecque*, Paris 1984, p. 264; J. Harrison, *Themis. A Study of Social Origin of Greek Religion*, New York 1962, p. 15.

¹³ Ephor., *FGrHist.*, 70 F 149 = Strabo, X 4,20, C 483. See Will, *Korinthiaka*, Paris 1955, p. 180 ss.; M. Broadbent, *Studies in Greek Genealogy*, Leiden 1968, pp. 50-56; Sergent 1984, pp. 38-53.

declares his loyalty to his patron: he is not passive anymore, but gives his consent. This ritual recalls rituals of initiation and the transition from youth to adult age. The story of Actaeon, son of Melissus, rent by his parents and his robber, a member of the Bacchiad dynasty, has elements in common with Cretan rituals: the leitmotif of the kidnapping and of the contrast of the parents. However the Corinthian myth does not seem modelled directly on the Cretan ritual but on the story of Actaeon, son of Aristaeus, linked to beekeeping. The foundation of Syracuse seems furthermore to be linked at the 'guilt' to its founder Archias and it also recalls an initiatic ritual of passage to adulthood.¹⁴

There are a lot of similarities between Boeotia's Actaeon and the Corinthian hero. They have in common, apart their name, also the tragic end. Plutarch's description gives importance also to another element: he reports that Habron, grandfather of Actaeon, went to Corinth to avoid the revenge of Pheidon of Argos. Settled in the village named Melissus, he had a son to whom he gave the name of the village. This is the father of the Corinthian Actaeon. Boeotian Actaeon's father is Aristeus, who is linked to beekeeping. Diodorus,¹⁵ describing the myth of Boeotian Actaeon, tells us that Aristaeus, "first taught to Man the art of coagulation of milk, the building of the beehives and the olive's cultivation." The name Melissus is the name of the town where the exiled Habron escaped but also the 'drone' that reminds us of the function of Aristaeus, the beekeeper. It is also important to linger over the name of the father of Melissus, the exiled Habron. This name derives from the word: *habrosyne*. The adjective *habròs* appeared in the archaic period with a positive connotation, but it is absent in Homer, in Hesiod and in the oldest poets like Callinus, Tyrtaeus, Archilochus and Alcman.¹⁶ The adjective is used by Sappho, Semonides, and Alcaeus between the end of the seventh and the beginning of the sixth century BCE.¹⁷ It is possible to establish the origin of the word in this period. The concept of *Habrosyne* comes from a Lydian Greek context of Minor Asia. *Habros* recalls the luxury, the splendour of the gold dress, the

¹⁴ Dougherty 1993, pp. 179-184.

¹⁵ Diod. Sic., IV 80, 81-82.

¹⁶ Xenoph., fr 3 Gentili -Prato; Theogn., 722; Sol. fr. 18 Gentili-Prato; Sapph., fr. 100 Voigt; Semon., fr. 7, 57 sgg. See M. Lombardo, 'Habrosyne e habrà nel mondo greco arcaico' in *Forme di contatto e processi di trasformazione delle società antiche*, Pisa-Roma, 1983, p. 1088, n. 41-42 and ss.

¹⁷ Sapph., fr. 100 ; fr. 58,25; fr. 44,7; fr. 128; fr. 140 Voigt; Semon., fr. 7, 57 sgg. ; Alc., fr. 42,8 Voigt.

refinement of the ointment, and reminds us of objects like the Lydian mitre or of the use of garlands and perfumes. There are characteristics typical of Asiatic nobles. The series of Lydian products reminds us of a substantial transformation of the social-economic situation compared, for example, to the luxury of Homeric *basileis*. In the later period there is the condemnation of *habrà*. The adjective does not show in the positive way the refinement and splendour typical of the oriental world but it becomes synonymous with weakness and immoderate luxury. This contrast of values corresponds to the Ionic rebellion and the Persian wars. After the Greek victory over the Persian empire, there were new cultural models based on the contrast between the Greek world and the oriental one. *Habrosyne* is replaced by the notion of *tryphé* with a negative connotation. If Habron's name derives from the adjective *habròs*, its origin can be found in the archaic period, when the adjective had a positive connotation. Therefore this element could let us place the origin of the legend in that time.

There is also in Boeotia another legendary figure whose destiny has elements in common with the Corinthian myth, in particular with Melissus. This concerns Milicertes, son of Ino and Athamas. The name of Melissus and Milicertes have the same root *mel-* that shows the honey and reminds us of the function of Aristaeus. The legend of Milicertes is reported by different sources.¹⁸ Athamas, father of Milicertes and brother of Sisyphus ruled in Boeotia. He provoked Hera to anger, having taken with him the young Dionysus, illegitimate son of Zeus and Semele, Ino's sister. The goddess drove Athamas mad and he killed his son Learchus, hunting him as a deer. Ino, wife of Athamas threw Melicertes into a boiling cauldron, then she sprang into the deep with the dead child. And she is called Leucothea, and Melicertes transformed into a *daimon* is called Palaemon. Sisyphus instituted the Isthmian games in honor of Melicertes. So There is a link with Corinth because the games dedicated to Milicertes-Palaemon are those of the Isthmian region. But there is a link with the myth of Archias because the suicide of Melissus happened during the celebration of the Isthmian Games, in honour of Melicertes-Palaemon. At the altar he pronounced curses against Corinthians, guilty of having left unpunished his son Actaeon's death. Melissus died like Melicertes; they threw him into an abyss during the games to honour the memory of Milicertes. They have in common the ritual of *katapontimos*

¹⁸ *Schol. Od.*, V 334; *Apollod.*, *Bibl.*, III 27-29; III 4,3. Sergent 1984, p. 269 and pp.146-150.

that happens in their death. The *katapontismos* has a positive connotation: Melissus and Melicertes, thrown from a cliff, established the application of the social rules. Melissus, as is evident in Plutarch's passage that describes the tragic end, was thrown into an abyss situated under Poseidon's temple. According to Will, this abyss corresponds to the underground *adyon* of the Palaimonion, the temple where Melicertes-Palaemon's grave was, the temple sacred to Poseidon. In conclusion, Will said that the death of Melissus on Palaimonion was perhaps a cathartic ritual that opened the Isthmian Games remembering death of Melicertes to whom these games were dedicated. There were these ceremonies also when Poseidon became the main God. Palaimonion's rituals had to be considered as the *protymata* of ceremonies in honour of Poseidon. Just as Melicertes, so Melissus was foreign and died in the same way. The story of Melissus and his son Actaeon could be a variant of Melicertes and his cousin Actaeon's myth.¹⁹ The two myths mix together and the Corinthian variant will be the background on which Archias' story will be based.

Another important element recurs in the legend of the foundation of Syracuse: Plutarch says that Archias will be killed in Sicily by his lover Telephos ὑπὸ τοῦ Τηλέφου δολοφονεῖται, ὃς ἐγεγόνει μὲν αὐτοῦ παιδικὰ. The name of Telephos reminds us the mythical hero, son of Herakles who, according to the tradition, led the Greeks at Troy.²⁰ The myth says that Telephos was breast-fed by a doe — like that of Artemis²¹ — and became dumb because, after having killed his uncle in a hunt, was sent to Mysia under the order of an oracle. Here, he obtained purification.²² We have, in this tradition, the same relation between *homicide*, *expulsion* ordered by the oracle, and *purification* like in the myth of Archias, and Heraklides himself.

Archias' myth was perhaps not all unknown by the poetry of Eumelus of Corinth, who organised the prehistory and the Corinthian myth history. We know from Pausanias²³ that Eumelus belonged to the Bacchiad's dynasty, as did Archias and his friend Chersicrates. This gives us an important chronological annotation. The Bacchiads had the power in Corinth until the seventh century BCE, when Cypselus ruled.

¹⁹ Will 1955, p. 172 ss. See Broadbent 1968, pp. 48 ss.

²⁰ Procl., Chrest., 80 Seve.; Schol. Hom. A 59. Cfr. A. Bernabe, *Poetae Melici Greci*, pars I, Stuttgart, Lipsia 1987.

²¹ Apollod., *Bibl.*, II 7,4; III 9,1; Diod. Sic., IV 33,11; Paus., VIII 48,7

²² Hyg., *Fab.*, 244.

²³ Paus. II 1,1 = Eumel., T 1 B.

Eumelus may also be the author of several epic poems: the *Titanomachy*, based on the divine prehistory of Corinth's dynasty, a work close to Hesiod's *Theogony*; the *Korinthiakà*, the Corinthian history from Ephyra, Ocean and Teti's daughter and the first inhabitant of the region; the *Europia* a *Νόστος τῶν Ἑλλήνων* and the *Bougonia*. According to West, it is an epic Corinthian cycle in which every work is dated around the seventh century BCE. To him is attributed the composition of a *prosodian* that the Messenians dedicated to Apollo when Phintas was the king, in the generation before the first Messenian war in the eighth century BCE. According to Pausanias, this would be the unique original work of Eumelus. To fill the chronological differences with the other works, West recommends lowering the date to the second Messenian war and not to the first one. According to this chronology, Clemens Alexandrinus²⁴ says that Εὐμελος δὲ ὁ Κορίνθιος πρεσβύτερος ὢν ἐπιβεβληκέναι Ἀρχία τῷ Συρακούσας κτίσαντι. The task is related to a previous notice that gives us a relative chronology between Simonides, Archilochus and Callinus; πρεσβύτερος ὢν shows that Eumelus was the oldest of the three poets but contemporaneous to Archias.

If we go back to the foundation myth, it is important to specify that the consonance with Boeotia's mythology must not surprise us because of the links of Corinth with Euboea and Boeotia.²⁵ In particular, Eumelus had to know the Theban myths very well, because he was *Europia's* author.²⁶

Another element of closeness with Boeotia is given by the fact that a member of the Bacchiad dynasty, Philolaus Of Corinth was active in Thebes as a legislator. He was the main character of a legislative reform in which the number of the kleroi, even if they were different for size, was equal to the number of citizens.²⁷ According to this interpretation, given by Aristotle, this measure did not concern only the present, but was also for the future, for keeping constant the number of lands of the patrons. In another passage,²⁸ Aristotle talks about Pheidon of Corinth. It is impossible to have a date or a precise context, but it underlines that Pheidon was one of the oldest legislators of the town, and all this

²⁴ Clem. Alex., Strom., I 131,8= Eumel., T 2 B.

²⁵ A. Debiasi, 'L'epica perduta: Eumelo, il Ciclo, l'Occidente', in *Hesperia 20. Studi sulla Grecità d'Occidente*, a cura di L. Braccasi, Roma 2004 p. 38.

²⁶ Eum., T 4 e fr. 11B.

²⁷ Arist., Pol., 1274 a.

²⁸ Arist., Pol., 1310 b.

reminds us of an archaic epoch previous to the tyranny of Cypselus. According to Will,²⁹ Pheidon's legislation was a conservative action. In fact, the division of lands for inherited succession brought about a breaking of the property and so too the loss of influence of the aristocratic rank composed of rich landowners. It was necessary to control the births to obtain this kind of result.

Will links Pheidon's legislation with that of Philolaus, applied in Thebes even if he was born in Corinth. The purpose of both was to avoid the breaking of the *kleroi*. The first did this through the prohibition of the division of lands, the second through controlling births. The legislation of Philolaus is transferred to Thebes in Pheidon's law and a defensive action of the landowners. Even if it was mentioned above that the *Titonmachy* could be near Hesiod's *Theogony*, it is important now to say that modern criticism recognizes in the *Europia*, as in the *Korinthiakà*, the influence of Hesiod. There are a lot of elements in common between the two poets, as was evident even to the ancients. In fact Clemens Alexandrinus perhaps referring to the edition in prose of the *Korinthiakà*, says τὰ δὲ Ἡσιόδου μετ' ἤλλαξαν εἰς πεζὸν λόγον καὶ ὡς ἴδια ἐξήνεγκαν Εὐμηλὸς τε καὶ Ἀκουσίλαος οἱ ἱστοριογράφοι. The work of Eumelus would be the result of the presentation in prose of Hesiod's poetry.

Hesiod did not ignore the story of Actaeon and Artemis as it results from some fragments (346W) in which the name *Aktaion* appears.³⁰ Perhaps it is not rash to suppose that Hesiod's version is previous to Eumelus and, because of this, archaic. The first version of the myth, perhaps linked to Hesiod, could have been taken by the Corinthian Eumelos who created a 'Bacchiad version'. If Eumelos was responsible of the adaption of the myth of Actaeon, we have to ask why Pausanias, who knows its works, does not refer to this Corinthian myth. In his work he records the myth of Aktaion devoured by his dogs and, speaking about the colonization of Syracuse, makes its foundation from Archias. We may suppose that Pausanias did not know the whole poem of Eumelos but only the *syngraphè*.

The story of the foundation of Syracuse and of its oikist, the Corinthian Archias, has been formulated in myth by the ancient tradition. If we read it in these narratives, it seems to belong to the sphere of the

²⁹ Will 1957, pp. 317-318. See P. De Fidio, 'Corinto e l'Occidente tra VIII e VI sec. a.C.', in *AMG*, XXXIV (1994), pp. 83-85; Salmon 1986, pp. 63-65.

³⁰ Fr. 346 W; see fr. 112-113 in *Esiodo, Opere*, a cura di Aristide Colonna, Torino 1977. Cfr. p. 18.

myth without a historical connotation. The foundation is thought to be a consequence of the guilt of Archias toward Actaeon and could be a classic example of several mythic versions created around the foundation of colonies. Also, the emphasis on the task of the founder could be the reflexion of the late epoch in which there was the need to give an important origin to the colonial foundation also through the valorisation and the exaltation of the founder hero. Some recent studies³¹ have tried to devalue this kind of tradition linked to the Greek colonies of the west that could be situated in the later period in relation to the colonial foundation with a clear, ideological element that could not have an objective historical value. But I am talking in particular about the strength of some traditions linked to a founder that could be late inventions, identities created for ideological or propaganda purposes. The goal of this work is revising this setting. The example of Archias in Syracuse is in this case very emblematic because he is a mythic character but remembered also by an archaic tradition linked to Archilochus. A fragment of Archilochus, handed down by *The Deipnosophistes* of Athenaeus³² mentions the wicked *Aithiops*, member of the colonial expedition that went with Archias towards Sicily and would have given his lands received in the new colony instead of a honey bun. The text says these words, without doubts καὶ οὗτος μετ' Ἀρχίου πλέων εἰς Σικελίαν ὅτι ἐμελλεν κτίζειν Συρακούσας... 'this, going to Sicily with Archias when he had to found Syracuse'. The foundation of the colony is pertinent to Archias, who, in the seventh century, is considered the guide of the expedition.

The fragment of Archilochus is the oldest one linked to Syracuse's foundation and shows that Archias was already known in the first half of the seventh century BCE. The fact that the tradition is archaic means it is necessarily a myth even if it has had an extension into the following period and leads us to revalue the historical reliability. It gives us some elements that are surely archaic, as the name of the founder, already known from Archilochus in the seventh century BCE.

³¹ R. Osborne, 'Early Greek Colonization? The nature of Greek settlement in the West' in *Archaic Greece: New Approaches and New Evidence*, ed. by N. Fisher, H. van Wees, London 1998, pp. 251-269; I. Malkin, 'Exploring the validity of the concept of 'foundation': a Visit to Megara Hyblaia', in *Oikistes. Studies in Constitutions, Colonies and Military Power in the Ancient World. Offered in Honor of A.J. Graham*, ed. by V.B. Gorman, E.W. Robinson, Brill, Leiden, Boston, Köln 2002, pp.195-223.

³² Archiloc., fr. 293 West= Athen., *Deipn.*, I 167 d.